



THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

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SEATTLE BECOMES FIRST CITY IN THE U.S. TO BAN CASTE DISCRIMINATION

The Seattle City Council on Tuesday voted to add caste as a protected category to the city's anti-discrimination laws

'MOVEMENT SHOULD SPREAD ACROSS STATES'

The city already bans discrimination based on disability, religion, sexual orientation. The latest move will prohibit businesses from discriminating on caste lines for jobs, access to public spaces and housing. "Now we need to build a movement to spread this victory around the country," tweeted city council member Kshama Sawant, who introduced the legislation

IT VIOLATES U.S. CONSTITUTION, SAY CRITICS

However, the move has evoked criticism as well. The Hindu American Foundation said in the guise of non-discrimination, the city will now single out South Asians, which is a violation of the US Constitution's guarantee of equal protection that prohibits the state from treating disparately people on account of their national origin or religion

42 lakh

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PERSONS OF INDIAN ORIGIN LIVING IN THE U.S.

Rupee-Dirham trade deal with the UAE in final run

Spadework already done; pact to be announced by leaderships of both nations

SHAHID FARIDI @ New Delhi

INDIA is set to sign a Rupee-Dirham trade deal with the United Arab Emirates.

Top Indian banking and finance officials are in Abu Dhabi for the three-day trip from February 21-23 to hammer out details of the deal.

According to sources, central bank and finance department officials of the two countries have been working together since late last year to put in place a Rupee-Dirham payment mechanism. They said officials of the Reserve Bank of India and UAE Central Bank have already done the groundwork for the introduction of bilateral trade in local currencies. The deal would soon be announced

by the top leaders of the two countries.

India-UAE relations have strengthened over the years and the two countries signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement last February to facilitate easier flow of goods and services between them. The UAE is India's third largest trading partner after the US and China.

The two countries currently use the US dollar to settle payments. The replacement of dollar with local currencies will result in savings on account of foreign currency conversion fee and facilitate easier flow of capital, including remittances. It would also help India save precious foreign exchange. Trade under this new India-



Vostro accounts

They involve a local bank keeping a foreign bank's money in local notes. It helps importers and exporters, as settlement in local currencies reduces forex risk and cost of transaction

UAE pact will be conducted through vostro accounts of banks of the two countries.

India has embarked on an ambitious journey to reduce the use of dollar and promote the rupee for bilateral trade. It is in an advanced stage of talks with several other countries for trade in local currencies. The decision will boost free trade between India and partner countries.

India had a Rupee-Rouble exchange mechanism with the erstwhile Soviet Union. The two countries made attempts to revive it after Western sanctions following the Russian invasion of Ukraine last year but have not been able to reach a final agreement yet. It's still work in progress.

MORBI BRIDGE COLLAPSE

HC directs Oreva to pay ₹10L each to kin of victims in 4 weeks

DILIP SINGH KSHATRIYA @ Ahmedabad

THE Gujarat High Court on Wednesday ordered Oreva group, which maintained the British-era suspension bridge in Morbi that collapsed killing 135 people in October last year, to pay ₹10 lakh each as "interim compensation" to the family of the deceased and ₹2 lakh each to those who have been injured within four weeks. The amount is in addition to ₹10 lakh already paid by the state government and the Centre.

While directing the company to pay compensation, Chief Justice Sonia Gokani and Justice Sandeep Bhatt noted that the victims' lives are completely disrupted. "Nobody can compensate them, this is just an attempt," the judges said.

The bench rejected the company's offer to pay ₹5 lakh each to the kin of those who lost their lives and ₹1 lakh to those injured, terming it "not enough". The bench also made it clear that Oreva's offer of compensation won't absolve it of its liability.

While fixing the compensation amount, the court cited the Supreme Court's observation that the private party must pay 55% with the remaining coming from state funds.

On the evening of October 30 last year, 135 visitors, including 35 children, were killed when the suspension bridge over the Machchu river collapsed. The repair and maintenance contract of the bridge was awarded to clock-manufacturing firm Oreva, which re-opened the bridge for visitors without getting a fitness certificate or prior approval from the Morbi municipality.

75% of 373 contracts of PWD given to single, two bidders, says CAG

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

AMIDST allegations of irregularities in awarding works to contractors, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report on "Planning and Contract Management of Road Works" in the Public Works Department (PWD) pointed to large-scale malpractice between 2016 and 2021 in the department. Interestingly, during the period, all the three major parties - Congress, Janata Dal (Secular) and BJP - were in power.



The performance audit was conducted covering financial years 2016-17 to 2020-21. The CAG report, which was tabled in the Assembly on Wednesday, stated that tender-inviting au-

thorities stipulated higher specification of machinery and invited tenders from higher class of contractors than required for the works. It said there was no database of contractors to verify the bid capacity. "... The department either allowed ineligible contractors to participate or restricted eligible contractors from participating and thereby limiting competition," it stated.

Of the 499 works awarded during the period, 131 had just single bidders and 242 projects two bidders. The total worth of works was Rs 2,738.86 crore of the entire Rs 3,583 crore of projects taken up during these years. Of the 131 works with just single bidders, contractors quoted 11 per cent to 32 per cent higher than the Tender Statement of Compliance rate. "This is a violation of Karnataka PWD Code that says in case of single bid, suspected collusion, or where the lowest evaluated responsive bid is substantially above the estimated cost, in such cases, first choice is for rejection of all tenders and re-inviting fresh tenders," the CAG said.

CONTINUED ON: P4

Roopa goes on with attack, Sindhuri seeks ₹1 cr damage

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

DESPITE instructions from the government to refrain from making allegations in public and being subjected to punishment transfer, IPS officer Roopa D Moudgil again took to social media, requesting the media to focus on corruption allegations against IAS officer Rohini Sindhuri. Sindhuri, meanwhile, approached a city court seeking an injunction. She also slapped a legal notice against Roopa, seeking an unconditional apology and Rs 1 crore in damages.

Roopa, in her Facebook post, stated, "Dear media, please keep the focus on the corruption issue that I have raised against Rohini Sindhuri IAS. I have not prevented anyone from fighting against corruption, that most affects common man."

Continuing, she also sought an inquiry into the pattern. Roopa said, "The PATTERN, where one IAS officer dies in Karnataka, one IPS officer dies in Tamil Nadu, one IAS husband-wife in Karnataka are already divorced. Me and my husband are still together. We are still fighting to keep family intact. Please question the perpetrator who exhibits the pattern becoming obstacle to family. Else, many more families will be destroyed. I am a strong woman. I will fight. Not all women have the same strength to fight. Please be a voice to such women. India is known for family values. Let's keep up that (sic)." P4

Train power wire snaps near Kolar, thousands stranded

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru/Kolar

THOUSANDS of train passengers suffered delays of over five hours between KSR and Bangarpet railway stations as the wires of the overhead electric equipment (OHE) snapped in Kolar on Wednesday afternoon when a train was passing.

To maintain continuity of service, the South Western Railways replaced electric locos with diesel locos for all express and superfast trains. The trains were made to stop at every station, delaying them enor-



No alert from Rlys

As the Railways failed to put out a message on the disruption of service on social media sites, many were stranded

mously, but offering some relief to stranded passengers. In all, 15 passenger trains were cancelled and as a result, buses plying towards Bangarpet were overcrowded.

The overhead electric wires snapped between Malur and Tyakal stations in Kolar district at 2.45 pm when the Bengaluru-Marikuppam passenger train (Tr no. 01775) was passing. The stations are on Bengaluru towards Bangarpet line (UP line), while the DOWN line (Bangarpet to KSR) remained unaffected.

CONTINUED ON: P5

LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT, DELHI

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